

# GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY;

OR,

# THE DIVINE PURPOSE.

## A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE PRESBYTERY OF NEW LISBON, OHIO, AND  
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## S E R M O N .

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EPH. I: 11.—According to the purpose of Him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

**T**HE sentiment of the text is evidently that of the Sovereignty of God, or the Divine Purpose.

It is not from an extreme fondness for speculation, or from a desire to grapple with things hard to be understood; with the incomprehensibilities of a lofty and mysterious theology, that I undertake the treatment of this theme; but from a sincere desire to discharge faithfully all the functions of my office as a steward of the oracles of God—to declare boldly the counsel, and the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

If I know myself, I can declare that I have no respect for that ambition “which seeks to be wise above that which is written.” On the other hand, I see no reason why we should not aim to be wise, at least full *up* to that which is written; and that the doctrine under consideration constitutes a part of the written word—the revealed mind of God, I have not the faintest doubt. Indeed I would not enter on so arduous and unpopular an undertaking as this, did I not think it right to follow fearlessly and unhesitatingly wherever the light of revelation leads me; and were I not firmly persuaded that this doctrine, like every other scriptural doctrine, is profitable, and in perfect harmony with the interests of truth and holiness in the world.

We shall attempt to state the doctrine.

We commence with the accurate, concise, and beautiful language of our incomparable catechism: “The decrees of God



are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." The word purpose is here employed in the singular number, to denote that it was but a single act of the eternal mind, embracing all events, beings and actions throughout the entire expanse of space, and throughout all periods of duration. The doctrine then seems to be this—that in creation, providence and redemption, God works in pursuance of a previous plan—a plan formed from all eternity, of which his works are the proper development. Or, to simplify it—that what God actually does, he always *meant* to do.

I. We shall offer a few remarks at once explanatory, and confirmatory of the doctrine thus stated.

1. Wherever we turn our eyes—in whatsoever direction we push our inquiries, and extend our researches, we meet everywhere with order; with evidences of skill, contrivance, and design. If we were to examine on a descending scale, all things within the range of our observation, commencing with those systems of shining orbs, in all their admirable regularity, with which the heavens are spangled, and which beam on our wondering view; coming down to the wonderful collections of matter in our own world, the exquisite adjustments, both in quality and quantity of the elements of which they are composed; the organization of our own bodies, and those of the brute creation; the formation of plants and flowers, and the structure of the minutest animalcule, visible only through the microscope, we would find that they are all pervaded with unmistakable indications of the most exquisite skill, the most consummate wisdom.

Then we state as a conclusion, what none but an atheist, or in other words, a madman, (for they are not worth the

trouble of a distinction), will dare deny, that all things within the range of human observation were constructed in accordance with previous designs—designs wise to a super-human degree. From the order, the marks of skill and intelligence, which obtain through all the departments of the material creations, is derived the strongest, most irrefragable argument in proof of the existence of a supreme creative intelligence.

Now, what we mean to assert is this, that the arrangements and adjustments to which we have just referred, furnish precisely the same argument for the decrees of God, that they do for the existence of God. Nay, we go a step further, it is by proving that he is a *designing mind* from the *actual disclosures* of his designs, that we prove his existence at all. Destroy the argument in proof of his designs, and you will also destroy that in proof of his existence. Deny the force of the one, and in the same ratio you will deny the force of the other also. If, therefore, all things in the material universe are subject to the designs of God, what reason have we for believing that the universe of mind is free from the control of his designs? Why confine the operations of the eternal mind to the world of matter, and exclude them from the world of mind? Why exclude Jehovah from the noblest and most dignified part of his own creation? Why should matter demand a larger share of the attention and care of the deity, than those noble and refined existences which stand nearest himself? While “you invest him with an entire and unexcepted sovereignty over the mass of unconscious bodies, why rifle from him his authority over the moral and intellectual empire of spirits?” “By erecting (says the mighty Chalmers), each of these spirits into a principle of *spontaneous and independent operation*, the capricious movements of which God can neither predict nor predetermine,

you lay open by far the noblest department of the universe to an anarchy which no power can control, and of which the issues no wisdom can foretell." But is the thing here supposed, possible? Can he erect anything into a principle of spontaneous and independent operation? Is it conceivable that God should bring any being into existence, and then render it independent of himself? And then, if all things must of necessity be dependent for their existence, on God, is it not hard that his wisdom should not have control over that which is momentarily kept in being by this power? And does not this supposition—a supposition on which alone the denial of this doctrine is based—involve the very essence of Atheism? He who made and who sustains all things, is represented as standing by, unable to foresee the turns, or to direct the transitions of all those random and unaccountable processes, that are now in the hands of his creatures; and let the plans and wishes of the Divine mind, have been what they may, there is naught in providence and naught in history that is sure. This consideration obtains great additional force, when we consider what mighty bearing little things often have on the greatest movements in the history of our world, and that therefore, if he is deprived of his management of that which is least, he is dethroned from his dominion over that which is greatest. You all know that there was a period in the history of our country when its dearest interests were in peril. In a very critical time, the most important stronghold in the land was betrayed, for money, into the hands of the enemy. The contract had just been finished, and Major Andre was on his way to the headquarters of the British, bearing about his person the documents that were to seal the doom of our rising but struggling Republic, when, on a sudden he was met by three American soldiers, who, suspecting that all was not right, commanded him to stop. He protested—in vain



—offered them gold—but they were proof to temptation. They proceeded to search him; but finding nothing of importance, were on the point of giving up the search, when the thought occurred to one of them that what they were in quest of might be in his boots, which, on examination proved correct, for there the ominous papers were found. And by that single incident was a dark train of evils averted from our beloved land. It is very probable but that for that suggestion of the soldier, the glory of this rising Republic would have been quenched in the dawn. If, therefore, God had not control over the thoughts and volitions of the three soldiers; if he had no influence over that *single* idea, which led to the discovery of Andre, then had his hand and counsel nothing to do with one of the grandest and most cheering passages in the history of our race—the establishment of a great empire of liberty in this western world. Then are we not to ascribe the triumphs of our ancestors, and the consequent freedom, independence and prosperity of our country to the kind interposition of heaven? The safety of our country, you will observe, all hinged on what the assertors of a self-determining power in man have placed beyond the reach of that being from whom he sprung, on the glancing of an idea into the mind of one, and a rapid volition in the minds of all the soldiers. And, to use again, the language of Chalmers, if there be anything there to abridge God of his sovereignty—if when it be the part of man to will, it is the part of God, as it were, to stand by, and to wait on the uncertain decision—if the Creator, instead of foreseeing all, and determining all, must thus attend on the decisions of the creature; and shape the measures of his earth according to the signals that are given out by the petty and independent powers that swarm on its surface—then, never in the whole history of this world's politics—we will venture to affirm—never was there exhibited a more

disjointed and tumultuous government—never have we read of a more helpless or degraded sovereign.

2. Reason as you may—lay down what premises and draw what conclusions you will, grant us but the simple doctrine of the Divine foreknowledge, and if you will yield to the dictates of candor, you are forced to admit that of foreordination also. For the human mind can conceive of only three cases in which the great first cause could have foreknown all future things.

First—He may have foreknown that all things would come to pass, according to chance; or, secondly—He may have foreknown that some great being, independent of him, over whom he had no power, would bring them to pass; or, thirdly—he foreknew from eternity that all things would come to pass, because from eternity he had determined himself to *bring* them to pass, and knew that no one could prevent him. Now, one of these propositions you must adopt in order to believe in the foreknowledge of God. Of no other case can the human mind conceive. Take the first proposition, and you are fatalist. You believe that the great God of Heaven is in the iron grasp of an irresistible necessity. If you take the second, you are a dualist, a believer in two independent Gods. Take the third, and you have adopted the very doctrine we aim to establish. Now, we address to your candor the question—Which of the three is the most consonant to the dictates of unperverted reason? Which the most agreeable to our natural conceptions of a great intelligent first cause?

But in order to evade this point, you deny the foreknowledge of God; then you have only one step further to take in order to land in blank Atheism—i. e., deny his existence. For if you feel at liberty, when it serves your purpose, to deny one attribute of the deity; the same rea-



son may impel you to deny another and still another, until you have ended by denying the whole.

3. It is supposed the force of such reasoning as this can be broken by the hypothesis that God has established in the universe certain general laws productive of general results; that he has left them to their own operations; and that every phenomenon and every event are not subject to them. That some are isolated and detached. That the world is governed by general laws, is by no means denied. But, how an all-perfect being can leave to their own operation a number of general laws, momentarily present to his infinite understanding, and incessantly kept in operation by his all-pervading energy, is what we are utterly at a loss to perceive. Here again as in a former supposition, is what we perceive a leaning to Atheism; or, at least, to the old Pagan doctrine, that the deity is cramped in his operations by something exterior to, and independent of himself; in opposition to the express declaration of Scripture, that of him, and through him, and to him, are *all things*. In accordance with the last mentioned sentiment, experience shows us, that general laws are the results of special adjustments, each of which demands particular attention and care on the part of the great originator and sustainer of all things, in order to the maintainance of the whole.

Furthermore, we hold that these general laws are far more general than our opponents do. In fact that they are universal—that if we could take a view of the whole system of things in all its mutual and widely extended bearings, we would perceive that there are no isolated or detached facts in existence; but that every event and every phenomenon may be referred to some general principle, just as the law of gravitation extends as well to the excursion of an atom, as to the revolutions of a planet and the mo-

tions of an entire system; and just as the ascent of smoke, which was once supposed to be an exception to that law, was found, on closer investigation, to be in perfect harmony with it.

Having seen that all things are included under general laws, we ask, who established them? Who sustains? Had God any definite ends or purposes in view, to be subserved, in establishing them? And are they so fixed and settled in their operation as certainly to accomplish those ends? What, then, are these general laws, but the *means* which God has appointed for carrying out his designs; parts of that grand scheme of operations which he is carrying on in the universe as age after age rolls on, and which was present to his infinite mind from all eternity.

4. We descend a step lower, and affirm that the simple intelligence of God goes to establish this doctrine. That God is an intelligent being, no Christian, at least, will presume to deny. Intelligence is an essential ingredient of a perfect being. Without it, God could not be holy, just, and good. Besides, we possess intelligence, and therefore our Maker must possess it. For it is an unquestionable principle, that as every effect has a cause, so there can be no more in the effect than there is in the cause. Now, it is essentially characteristic of an intelligent being "to know and to judge—to purpose ends, and to devise means—to conceive a plan, and then proceed to execute it." These enter into the very idea of intelligence, as essential ingredients of it. Intelligence in its lowest possible state, must possess them. Wisdom, belongs to an elevated degree of intelligence, and consists in purposing good ends, and devising suitable means; but the purposing of ends, and the devising of means, belongs to intelligence in every state—in the lowest conceivable state; so that without these, you cannot form an idea of it.

If, therefore, God does anything at random, his intelligence is not perfect. If he created the world, made man, fashioned his body out of the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living soul; if he established certain laws for the regulation of the world he made, and all its affairs, without intending before hand to do them, and without any ultimate object in view, he is destitute of intelligence—his power is blind force—he is incapable of holiness, justice and goodness—he is not a fit object of love or fear—in a word, he is no God. So that a denial of the decrees of God involves a denial of his intelligence, and therefore of his supreme Godhead.

But, on the other hand, if God be the author and disposer of all things, and if He be possessed of intelligence, then must he have arranged before hand, everything respecting the formation and disposal of all things.

5. We come at last to the strongest and most satisfactory of all arguments—the declarations of God's own word on the subject. And we will find these stronger and more unyielding than the formularies of most churches, and the creeds of most parties. So much so, indeed, that some reputedly orthodox divines have thought fit to soften down some of what they deemed the harsher expressions, in order to render the doctrine a little more popular with the multitude. I question, however, whether their Maker will thank them for their service. We read in the Bible of the foreknowledge of God—of his purpose—of his will—of the *determinate counsel* of his will—of predestination, etc. We refer to the context,—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world—having predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus



Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which He hath purposed in himself: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning." "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations." "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain." "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Moreover, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." "For he saith unto Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharoah,—“Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.” “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth.” “Thou wilt then say unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man! who art *thou that repliest against God?* Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay to make of the same lump one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering, vessels of wrath

fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, whom *he* hath *afore* prepared unto glory, even us whom he hath called not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." "Who doeth according to his will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and whose arm none can stay, saying unto him, what doest thou?" "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from the ancient times, the things that are not yet done, saying, "my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." It is needless to multiply texts. Here is the doctrine under consideration set forth, in as intelligible a form as any doctrine was ever expressed in any of the languages of men. If such a doctrine is not revealed in these passages, we can not conceive how it is possible for such a doctrine to be revealed—how words can be put together so as to express it. What stronger ground can any demand for their faith to rest upon, than the infallible testimony of God? One word from the mouth of him who can not lie, is mightier than all the reasoning that we can advance for this doctrine, or the objections which its adversaries can urge against it. And if the word of God can not convince men of its truth, we give up the attempt in despair.

## II. The properties or characteristics of the Divine decrees.

1. They are co-existent with their author. This in reference *to some of them*, none professing the Christian name will deny; such as the creation of the world—the formation of man, and the mission of the Saviour into our world. But it has been asserted by some that those decrees which are dependent for their execution, on the free agency of man, are made in time. This opinion, how-

ever, is in flat contradiction to the express language of Revelation. There it is positively affirmed that believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; that grace was given in Christ before the world begun. "Known unto God *are all* his works from the beginning." Why? Because from the beginning he had formed this plan, of which his works are the expression. His knowledge of his works, of course, depended on his purpose respecting them. This opinion is needless. It explains nothing—solves nothing—darkens much. It is introduced to subserve a certain purpose—a purpose equally as mean and worthless as the opinion itself—that of attempting to establish the independence of the creature at the expense of the majesty of the Creator. It proceeds from mental imbecility, or rather, from low and narrow views of the Deity; and is utterly inconsistent with the idea of infinite perfection. It supposes the knowledge of infinite intelligence itself to be capable of increase, and thus limited and imperfect. It supposes the Deity to have no previous plan at all—or, at least, a plan which does not extend to all the things and beings which he hath made—a plan susceptible of improvement from new accessions of knowledge, and, therefore, contracted and defective. Who does not see that this view derogates greatly from the glory of him, who is the original cause and final end of all things.

If he receives new accessions of knowledge in the progress of duration—if he forms new plans—if he is changing and vacillating in his schemes—then is he not that being whose understanding is infinite—who is of one mind, and who can turn him. But if all possible causes and effects—all events and combinations of circumstances, were present to his infinite mind from all eternity, why defer to time his decisions respecting them? But, perhaps, it will be said, that human actions and events dependent on human voli-



tions were beyond the reach of his prescience. Has he then no control over human volitions? Are not the hearts of all men in the hand of the Lord? And were not many of those events which he has so clearly foretold in his word, and which, therefore, he must have foreknown, brought to pass through human instrumentalities, and yet so fixed and settled that they could not be changed without affecting the divine veracity?

2. Comprehensiveness, or universality, is another characteristic of the divine purpose. It extends to all things and beings throughout the universe. It is concerned with things necessary, free and contingent. Not only with things great, but also small—from the revolutions of the planets to the movement of an atom—from the seraph that burns before the throne of God, to the worm that crawls on his footstool—from the rise and decay of empires to the minutest affairs of every individual of the human race. Everything about our life and death, our state in time, and our destiny in eternity, is immutably fixed by the counsel of Heaven. He not only purposed to establish general laws, but arranged those particular cases—those nice and exquisite adjustments out of which general laws arise. The care of providence, which is but a development of the divine purpose, reaches to the minutest events and to the most insignificant creatures—to the boundaries of our habitations, the number of our days, the death of a sparrow, the falling of a hair. Some talk of a general providence, to the exclusion of a particular, as though the infinite mind were in danger of being burdened with care, or perplexed with multiplicity of objects. Broad views, indeed, of absolute intellectual perfection! The idea is as absurd as that of a physician having a general practice, but no particular patient; or of a certain scholar being a man of general reading, but never having read a single book. A general

providence is necessarily dependent on a particular one, by reason of the concentration of events, according to which the great depend for existence on the small. Philosophy tells us that generals are made up of particulars. Mountains are composed of particles—oceans of drops; species of individuals; and those chains of providence, of which parts are open to human inspection, and parts lie beyond the reach of mortal gaze, and whose ends are fastened to the eternal throne in heaven, are made up of innumerable links, each of which, however small and insignificant, is indispensable to the integrity of the whole; and the breaking of the smallest would prove as serious a matter as the breaking of the greatest.

3. The purpose of God is wise. He is the only wise God, and, therefore, his purpose must be wise. It is called in the text the counsel of his will, not to imply consultation with others, reflection—the process of deduction—a process inconsistent with the idea of infinite intelligence—but to denote that it is consummately wise. Wisdom consists in a proper arrangement of ideas—in the exact adaption of one thing to another—in the selection of the best ends and fittest means. Of the works of God, in which his eternal counsel is disclosed, the inspired Psalmist says, “in wisdom thou hast made them all.” This declaration is confirmed by our own observation. It is true, but a small part of them can we trace out, and in order to judge of them at all, we must judge of the whole, by the part of what is invisible by what is seen. But as far as we can go, everything bears the impress of matchless intelligence, of a Divine hand. Why should we not believe that beyond those boundaries, to which our faculties are confined, there is the same beautiful order—the same harmony of things to each other, and to the character of God, the Author of all; and what appears to us, disorder, is only arrangement be-

yond our comprehension. That the works of God are all made in wisdom, is only a proof of the wisdom of that great scheme of which they are the filling up. "Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out;" was the adoring and reverential language of the Apostle Paul, while surveying with an inspired eye, the counsels of the most High: convinced by experience as well by the word of God, of the same excellent truth, well may we cherish the same feelings, and employ the same language.

And though we are not prepared to subscribe to what divines call the optimist theory, i. e., that the actual system of the universe is the best possible system, though we must say with Psalmist that such knowledge is too high for us, we can not attain unto it; yet the more closely and carefully we examine the works and ways of God, the more deeply impressed are we with the truth, that "God is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

4. The decrees of God are free and uncontrolled. "Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" Some by carrying the theory of motives too far, or rather by reasoning on principles, which are beyond the reach of their faculties, have arrived at the conclusion that the eternal plan of God, and consequently the system of things could not have been different from what they are—that the creation of the world, the state of the race, and the plan of recovery through Christ, must have been just what they are. That the deity is subject to a law of internal necessity. This opinion we are not prepared to endorse. It is too mighty—too unwieldy for



our feeble grasp. In treating on it, we seem to be floundering out of our depth. Nor can we avoid thinking that it is derogatory to the majesty of God, and injurious to the feelings of piety. We content ourselves therefore with affirming that the decrees of God are free; that his determinations were not influenced by any external cause, because when he formed them he dwelt alone in the stillness and solitude of his own eternity; and whatever exists exterior to himself, sprang from the determination of his will, and the exertion of his power; that whatever may have been the reasons of his choice, they could not have been such as to necessitate his procedure; that, though he must have had reasons, and wise ones too, yet no reasons could so influence his choice that it could not be otherwise. We, therefore, stop short of the conclusion to which we have referred—because we want to find in the *will* of the great first cause, associated of course with wisdom, the *reason*, and the sole reason of all created things, independently of any fatality or necessity whatever. We want to ascribe to that will the most unbounded dominion. We desire to view him as the supreme God—the highest, the very highest sovereign of the universe. We wish to see nothing above him—nothing beyond him; but him first—him midst—him without end. Our God is in the heavens—he hath done whatsoever he pleased. Hence,

5. We affirm that the divine decrees are independent and unconditional. Our meaning is, that as no external cause could have forced him to form a purpose, so having formed one, no external cause, or will, or force, can prevent the execution of it. This, we know is denied by all those who hold that many of the decisions of the divine will are suspended on the will of man, and that the will of man is beyond the control of his maker. But this opinion is as irrational as it is impious. For if God has no control over

the will of man, he is liable to be defeated and foiled in all his plans; the scheme of the universe is broken up, and such a thing as providence, even general providence, is utterly inconceivable; for as we have said before, generals are composed of particulars—general laws arise out of certain minute and special adjustments. If the power of God has no control over the will of his creature, nothing is settled—nothing is certain, and the great ruler of the world is struck with imbecility—is reduced to utter impotence. Thus would certain weak men assert the freedom and independence of the creature, by necessitating the creator—by chaining him down to the will of man. In opposition to this, God declares—“My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure;” and it is remarkable that he says this in reference to events, which were brought to pass through the instrumentality of human volitions as the following verse shows—“calling a ravenous bird (the Persian king) from the east, the *man that executeth my counsel* from a far country: yea, I have spoken it—I will also bring it to pass; I have *purposed it*—I will also do it.” Here so far from being dependent on the will of man, he claims supreme control over it. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning.” How can this be true, if in consequence of the independence of the will of man, all his future proceedings are precarious? “He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” Is he then liable to be counteracted and defeated in all his plans by the wayward volitions of his own creatures? But it is urged, that the Bible asserts that some of the decrees are conditional. That the preservation of Paul and his companions on their voyage to Italy, was suspended on the condition that the sailors should not leave the ship. That the salvation of sinners is conditioned on the exercise of faith in the Saviour. But a more comprehensive view of the subject would discover

the utter futility of this objection, by perceiving that what are called conditions in the cases referred to, were only the means, whereby the ends were to be accomplished; and that the means, as well as the ends, were included in the divine decree. For example,—If God had purposed that Paul and his fellow-passengers should be saved from drowning, he purposed also to save them by the instrumentality of the sailors, and accordingly ordered that Paul should give warning in time of their intention to leave the ship, in order that their escape should be prevented. If he has determined to save certain sinners of mankind on condition of their believing, he has determined also to give them grace sufficient to secure their compliance with the conditions, and thus effectually to bring about his own purpose. “Hence we read that whom he predestinated, them he also called.” The only difference between us, and those who assert, what are called conditional decrees is, that we place the conditions within the decrees, and they would place them *without*.

This doctrine, however, is attended with difficulties. Certain parts of it are shrouded in mysteries which can never be fully cleared up in this state of existence, and which must be left for a full solution to the developments of a nobler sphere of existence. But the same can be said of almost every doctrine of Revelation, for every part of revealed truth can be traced up to infinitude, and there we are lost amid the clouds and darkness that surround his throne. The denial of this doctrine would not free us from its difficulties, for they are difficulties which press with equal force on every system of moral theism, while it would involve us in darkness, and have a tendency to weaken our confidence in the all-controlling providence of God.

Let us look at some of these difficulties. First,—It is thought an insuperable objection that the purpose of God



should have anything to do with evil, especially with moral evil. Two things, however, every sane man must admit, that moral evil actually exists, and that God permits, or does not choose to prevent it, or to exert that amount of moral influence which is necessary to prevent it. Let the objector take a single step further,—that God always intended to permit it, or always intended not to prevent it, or always intended to do just as he actually does; and he has conceded the whole ground between us. Our objectors have overlooked the fact, that the Bible in many passages asserts the providence and purpose of God in cases involving sin, and in one case a dreadful sin—a sin of turpitude, unparalleled in the history of our race. The passage to which I refer, is found in Acts 2: 23—“Him being delivered by the *determinate counsel* and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Here the Apostle Peter expressly told the Jews the crucifixion of the Messiah was according to the determinate counsel of God, and yet charges the guilt of it home upon their own consciences with fearful energy.

We pass on to another phrase of the same difficulty, that if God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, the whole series of events is necessary, human liberty is destroyed, and man is not responsible for his actions. There are several ways of turning aside the edge of this objection. Here are two propositions, that man is entirely dependent on the will and power of his creator, and that he is free and morally responsible to his governor—each of these can be established on its separate and independent evidence. The word of God and right reason affirm that the creator has a complete control over his own workmanship—consciousness tells that man is free—the word of God and conscience assert his moral responsibility. Thus the two separate truths are established by two separate

proofs and when viewed separately, these proofs are acknowledged to be irrefragable. Is it demanded of us to reconcile them? We answer, we are not bound to offer a positive reconciliation of them. Is it required of us in any other department of philosophy, to point out the bond which unites two truths established on independent evidence, before the mind gives its assent to them? Is it required of the physical investigator to point out the connection between mechanical and chemical combinations, before we believe in their existence? No; we only require him to furnish us with the separate evidence of each. But some one comes forward and declares them to be contradictory. We immediately throw on him the burden of proof; and until he has at least *attempted* to prove his proposition, it is needless for us to attempt to refute it.

Furthermore, it can be said, that no necessity destroys the liberty of the will and the moral quality of actions; but the necessity of external violence. That the force of internal dispositions only increases the praiseworthiness or the blameworthiness of our actions. For example, the man into whose hand is forced the deadly weapon, and who is compelled, against the strongest resistance of his sensibility and will, to plunge it into the bosom of a beloved friend, we would pronounce entirely free from guilt and blame. The guilt, we would attach to those who forced him to the perpetration of the foul deed. But let him or another commit the same act from the strength of malice, or revenge, or a craving thirst for blood, and we would not fail to execrate him as a ruthless villain, worthy of the direst punishment<sup>3</sup>.

But, analogy may throw some light on this dark part of our subject. "Who," says an eminent writer, "is a stranger to the fact, that from infancy to old age, we are more or less influenced by the plans or purposes of others. The

plans or purposes of a parent, may determine almost everything about the destiny of a child. The purpose to remove from regions of malaria, may secure his health. The change from one clime to another, may determine the liberty he shall enjoy—the measure of intelligence—the profession he shall choose, and ultimately his doom here and hereafter. Nay, his purpose may fix the very college where he shall study—the companions he shall choose—the law office or seminary where he shall prepare for professional life; and, finally, everything which may establish his son in the world. So the plan of the infidel is successful in corrupting thousands of the young—the purpose of Howard, secured the welfare of thousands of prisoners—the determination of Washington, resulted in the independence of his country. In all these, and ten thousand other cases, there is a plan formed by other beings in respect to us, which finally enters as a controlling element into our destiny. If it be said that they all leave us free, so we say of the decrees of God, that we have a like consciousness of freedom. In neither case, does the foreign purpose cripple or destroy our freedom!"

III. We will endeavor to give the subject a practical application.

With those who oppose the distinguishing doctrines of our church, it is a favorite method of combatting many of those doctrines, to say that they are of no practical utility whatever; that if their tendency be not decidedly pernicious, neither is it beneficial. The question, however, to be decided is, Are they true? Are they revealed in the word of God? If so, then are they practical. For God would not have revealed any doctrine for no practical purpose whatever. Whatever he has revealed, is fitted to exert upon the heart a practical influence of the most

beneficial kind. It would be wise in those cavilers to yield to him the prerogative of judging what portions of universal truth are practical and fit to be made known to the children of men, and what are not. That, like every other portion of truth, they are susceptible of abuse from the depravity of our nature, we candidly admit. But that their tendency is dangerous; nay, that it is not decidedly good, we strenuously deny. The nature of the tendency of this doctrine, it is not difficult to perceive.

1. It affords scope for moral trial. Its tendency is, to show what there is in the heart of man—what is the true state of the heart in reference to God. It tests the heart. It discloses the true feelings in respect to the unlimited dominion of our glorious Maker. Bitter persistent hostility to this truth evinces a want of confidence in the moral character of the deity, and in the rectitude of his will; and nowhere does the carnal heart manifest its distrust of, and enmity to God, more readily than on this very point. It is much easier to yield an external conformity to the precepts of the moral law, than cordially to acquiesce in this truth. For the reasons of those requirements are generally obvious, whereas the reasons of the procedures of the divine sovereignty are for the most part hidden from mortal gaze; on the other hand, a hearty practical submission to the sovereignty of God, is evincive of a state of heart friendly to him—of love to his moral character—of trust in the rectitude of his will. It discovers the very spirit which actuated the soul of the holy Redeemer. “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” And a cordial embracing of this doctrine, is fitted to cultivate that spirit; to form a character of profound submission to the will of the Supreme Ruler; a character conformable to the whole scheme of the moral universe.

To the avowed adversary of this doctrine, I would say,



Why oppose a principle so evidently revealed in the Bible—so consonant to the dictates of enlightened theism? Are you afraid to trust the government of the universe in the hands of its Maker? Having removed him from the helm of universal empire, whom will you place there in his stead? Will you place chance or contingency there? Can you have more confidence in sightless, aimless chance—in an incontrollable fatality, than in the unerring wisdom of the greatest and best of all beings? Will you place your own will there? Have you then more confidence in your own wayward and depraved volitions, than in the infallible will of heaven's monarch? Proud, presumptuous mortal! dare you aspire to be superior to the Maker of heaven and earth? And what can your opposition avail? If he has actually decreed whatsoever comes to pass, can your opposition alter that fact? If he is the universal sovereign, can you dethrone him? Make the vain attempt; call to your aid those rebellious spirits who inhabit the nether regions, and in one tremendous host wage war against the eternal throne. What have you done? You have not touched him? One faint angry breath of his, would make you shrink into eternal perdition. "He that sitteth in the heavens, shall laugh."

2. This doctrine presents an exalted view of our Maker, and is fitted to inspire us with sentiments of reverence and awe. It exhibits him in the august character of the supreme Lord of the universe, who doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and whose hand no one can stay, saying unto him, What doest thou? His language to this lower world is, "be still and know that I am God—I will be exalted on the earth." Oh, man! who art thou that repliest against God; shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?

The Lord reigneth, let the earth tremble.

3. It has a tendency to humble the spirit of man, and stain the pride of human glory. When any one rightly apprehends this doctrine, he feels that he is completely in the hands of God; his loftiness is bowed down, his haughtiness is made low, and the Lord alone is exalted. He is reduced to the proper condition of a creature—a condition of entire dependence upon God. Every rising of his heart against it, is a fresh proof of its awful depravity, and a fresh cause of sorrow and self-abasement. And as the divine majesty and rule rise before him in all their grandeur and glory, he is ready to cry out, behold, I am vile, behold, I am vile. He hangs down his head, covers his face, and prostrates himself at the footstool of eternal Majesty.

4. But the effects of this truth are as soothing as they are beneficial; for to the humble believer, it is replete with the richest consolation. It inspires confidence and gratitude. The believer is led to regard every blessing that he enjoys as coming from God, in consequence of a benevolent purpose—as an emanation from designing benevolence. If he has a persuasion, however weak, that he is born again, passed from death unto life, he ascribes the happy change to the operation of the grace of God. That grace he traces back to the original fount—the eternal decree of Jehovah. He sees that his conversion was no recent thing in the mind of God—that it existed there in the form of a design, a purpose—a purpose full of grace and love, from all eternity; and this view gives him a deeper sense of the goodness of his heavenly Father. He sees that before heaven and earth were created, his heavenly Father destined him to enjoy a happiness which will continue, when heaven and earth shall have passed away; and his heart overflows with gratitude and love. No wonder that he feels confident that he who hath begun in him a good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It imparts a feeling of security. The believer sees that he is completely in the hands of God. There he feels safe. No foe can touch him—no evil befall him without his permission, and without subserving some good purpose. And in the contemplation of this truth, he feels a deep satisfaction—a sweet, tranquil joy.

When the dark and cloudy day of adverse vicissitude comes, and billow often billow rolls over him, his consolation is that “God rideth on the whirlwind, and directeth the storm.” And though often disposed to say with Jacob, “All these things are against me, yet when he views every event as the appointment of a heavenly Father, he can say with Eli, “it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”

Hence it inspires hope. Tribulation, we read, worketh patience—and patience, experience—and experience, hope. Led to view “all events in the hand of God, and the hand of God in every and each event;” or to view at the head of all affairs, a being infinitely holy, just and good, ruling and overruling all things for the glory of his name, and causing all beings, and actions, and events, to work together for the highest well-being of his church, and advancement of his kingdom, he is prompted to look for a brighter day to dawn upon himself, and a brighter era to rise upon this sin-disordered world, when all the rich goodness of the divine promises shall be realized, and all the splendors of prophetic visions shall be ushered in.

Lastly, this doctrine, when rightly apprehended, quickens the activities of our natures, and prompts to exertion. It is by the ordination of God that all the trains of events are unseparably linked together, so that the same consequents invariably follow the same antecedents—the same causes, and combinations of causes, produce the same effects, out of which arise all the harmonies and beauties of the universe. By the purpose of God is the connection



between means and ends, rendered a matter of necessity—is formed a close alliance between industry and prosperity ; sowing and reaping ; conduct in youth, and consequences in manhood and old age ; character on this side of death, and a condition on the other side of it. So that if I shall attain the end, I must apply the appointed means—if I would gather the golden sheaves, I must sow the precious seed—if I would thrive in the world, I must be active, vigilant, energetic—and if I would reach a blissful immortality, I must live in the exercise of faith in Christ, and in the practice of holiness. It is only from the employment of the means that I can expect to attain the end. For the purpose of God includes both, and renders the one as indispensable as the other, so that I can not be saved without effort, nor be lost, except through my own fault. If I am not elected to the means, neither am I elected to the end. If I am not chosen before the foundation of the world, that I might be holy, then am I not chosen to eternal salvation. Talk about the purpose of God discouraging the use of means, when it is the very thing that renders the means indispensably necessary, and provides too, for their employment. But for this arrangement there would be no certainty in the affairs of this world, or in the affairs of the next. Thus the doctrine, when broadly and intelligently viewed, so far from acting as a soporific, proves but a powerful stimulus to holy effort. It can not engender licentiousness. “It will throw ardor into the spirit, fire into the eye, and vigor into the limb.” It will also enable me to anticipate the end from the use of the means. To make my election sure, by making my calling sure. To look for my destiny in heaven, from my progress in the road that leads to it. To read my title clear to a place among the sons of God, from a growing conformity



of character to the image of the first born; and thus to go on in the way of duty, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.

The Lord reigneth—let the earth rejoice—let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

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